

ORGANISED. UNIFIED. RECOGNISED.

MOBILISING THE FIGHT FOR SEX WORKER RIGHTS

Impact Report

JANUARY 2010–DECEMBER 2020

**European Sex Workers'
Rights Alliance (ESWA)**

Formerly the International Committee on
the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE)



INTRODUCTION

In 2002, against a backdrop of increasingly repressive legislation and policies, a small collective of sex workers came together to form a working group that would track, respond to, and fight back against such ‘progress’. Two years and 15 member groups later, the International Committee for Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) set out to hold an event that would bring their community together and create a much-needed forum to declare, defend and fight for their rights.

Held in Brussels in October 2005, this catalytic conference saw the creation of three key documents:

- 1. **Sex worker demands for policy reform:** Delivers a series of key recommendations addressing the protection of sex workers’ human, health and labour rights.
- 2. **The Declaration on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe:** Exposes the violations and outlines the human rights shared by *all* people through international treaties and law.
- 3. **The Sex Workers in Europe Manifesto:** Presents a vision of the changes needed to build an equitable and just society in which the human rights of sex workers are respected and protected.

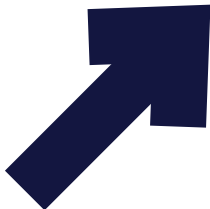
In the summer of 2021, ICRSE became the **European Sex Workers’ Rights Alliance (ESWA)**. The largest network of sex worker rights organisations in Europe, we represent over 100 member groups from 30 countries.



Our vision is of a world where sex work is recognised as work, and where sex workers can live their lives free from violence, coercion, discrimination and exploitation.

Our mission is to build a network of member organisations and allies united in the fight for sex worker rights – advocating for the development of law, policy and practices that respect and protect the human, health and labour rights of sex workers in Europe and Central Asia.

Following the launch of our new brand and strategic plan, this document creates an important space to reflect on the impact and success of the past 10 years. In doing so, we want to mark all that we have fought for – and achieved – as we work to protect the human, health and labour rights of sex workers everywhere.



WE ARE BUILDING INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE STRENGTH

To achieve real change, sex workers must be seen – and see themselves – as agents of that change. That’s why ESWA has built (and continues to build) a strong, diverse and vibrant community, welcoming over 70 member groups since 2010 and representing an estimated 50,000+ sex workers from 30 countries. It is by creating these connections, and supporting individual and collective action, that we have become the driving force behind an engaged, empowered and effective movement for change.

OUR FOCUS AREAS:

Health	Justice	Development
Ensuring sex workers are served and included in the HIV response.	Evidencing and documenting the impact of criminalisation.	Providing financial and technical support to member groups.
Protecting the livelihoods and rights of sex workers during COVID-19	Raising & including the voice of sex workers as victims of crime, exploitation and trafficking.	Developing individual and group leadership and advocacy skills.

Always responding to the needs of our members, we build the capacity of individuals and groups through in-person and online training, mentoring and skills development, convenes and exchanges, advocacy resources and toolkits, sub-grants and funding.

‘Rights Not Rescue’

From 2019 to 2021, ‘Rights Not Rescue’ worked with 12 member groups in 10 countries to empower migrant sex workers to tackle exploitation and trafficking through:

- The organisation and unionisation of migrant sex worker communities.
- The delivery of direct support services.
- Networking, collaboration and information sharing.
- Sub-grant funding totalling £113,266.
- Access to justice by improving understanding of local laws and migrant rights.

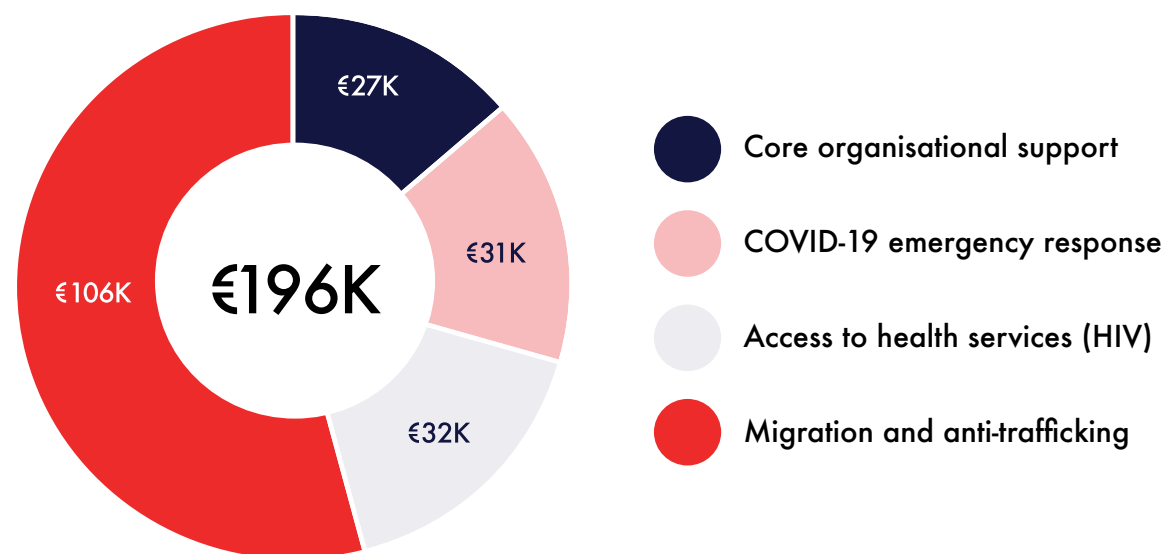
Critically, this project also enabled the development of five new resources, including our first participatory research project, [‘Undeserving Victims.’](#)

A growing movement

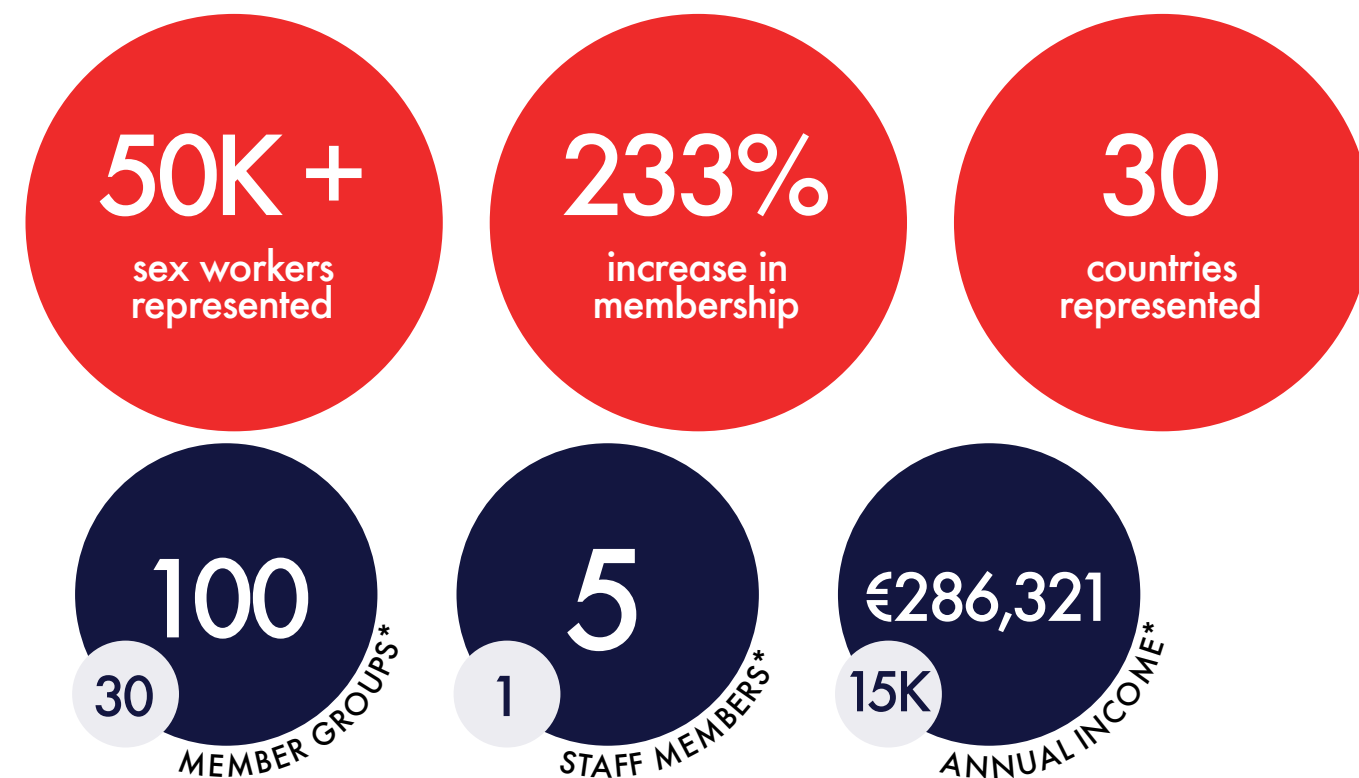
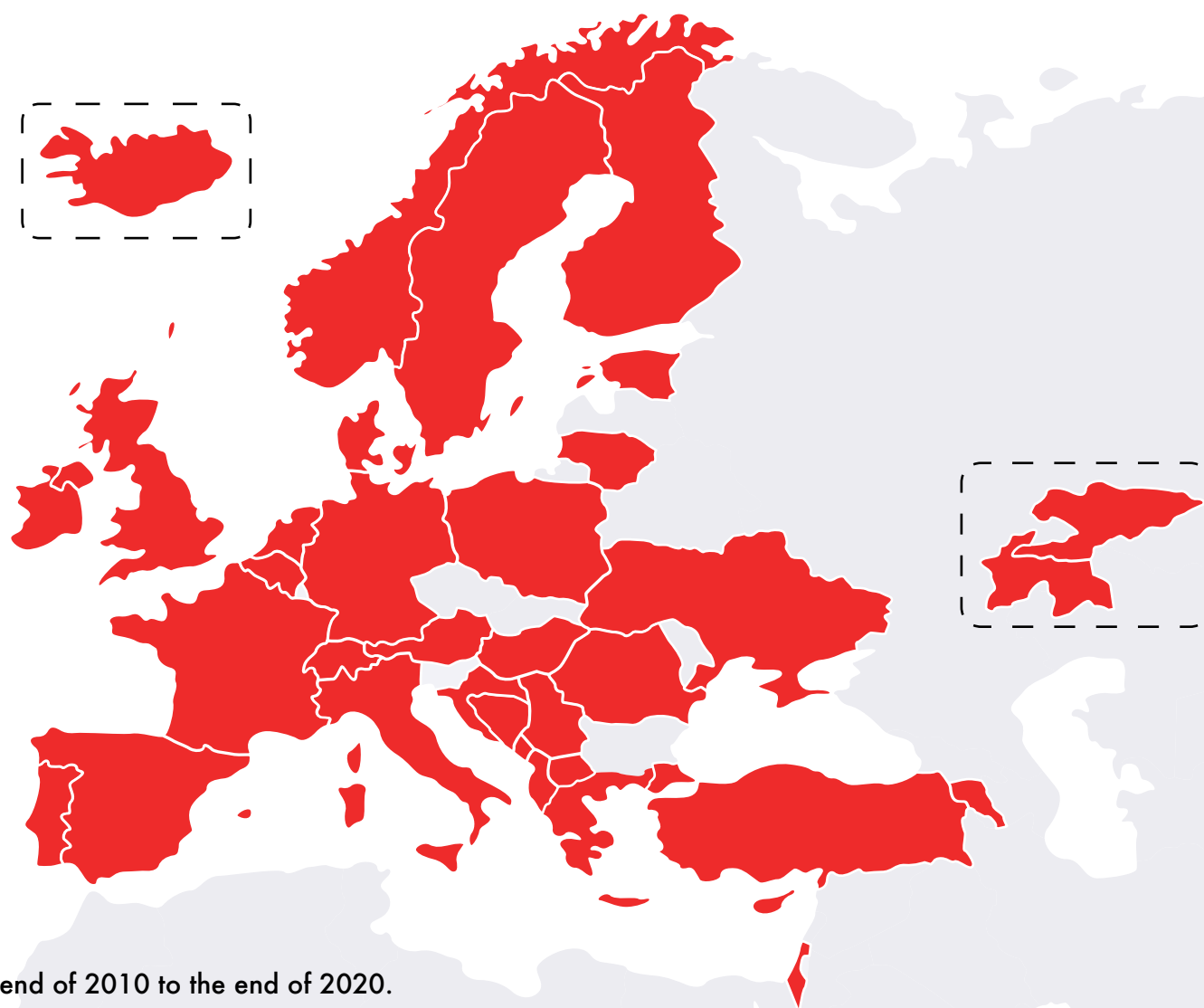
It only takes a spark to light a fire. Over the last decade, ESWA has played a significant role in supporting and mobilising the development of sex worker-led organisations in the region, particularly in countries with limited or no sex-worker led movement before that. Offering both technical and financial support in Albania, Belgium, Greece, Portugal and Romania (to name a few), ESWA collaborated with sex workers and allies to organise trainings and events that would further the creation and development of new collectives and organisations. Together they are a voice for change.

OUR IMPACT

GRANTS DISTRIBUTED *



MEMBER COUNTRIES



PAPERS & TOOLKITS

INTERSECTIONAL BRIEFS

Surveilled. Exploited. Deported. Rights Violations Against Migrant Sex Workers in Europe and Central Asia
 Underserved. Overpoliced. Invisibilised. LGBTI Sex Workers Do Matter
 Understanding Sex Work as Work: A Brief Guide for Labour Rights Activists
 Understanding Sex Workers' Right to Health: Impact of Criminalisation of Violence
 Feminism Needs Sex Workers. Sex Workers Need Feminism. For a Sex Worker-Inclusive Women's Rights Movement

PUBLICATIONS

Sex Workers on the Frontline: The Role of Sex Worker Rights Groups in Providing Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic
 'Undeserving Victims?' A Community Report on Access to Justice for Migrant Sex Workers
 COVID-19 Crisis Impact on Access to Health Services for Sex Workers in Europe and Central Asia
 Collateral Damages of Anti-Trafficking Laws and Measures on Sex Workers
 Trafficking 101: A Community Resource for Sex Workers' Rights Activists
 Overview of Germany's 'Prostitutes Protection Act'
 Community Report on Exploitation in the Sex Industry
 Nothing About Us Without Us! 10 Year Report on Sex Workers' Rights in Europe and Central Asia
 Community Report on Structural Violence

TOOL KITS & MANUALS

Sex Work and HIV in Europe
 Diverse. Resilient. Powerful. Intersectional Activism Toolkit for Sex Workers And Allies
 Sex Work, HIV and Human Rights
 "Hands Off Our Clients!" - Advocacy and Activism Tool Kit Against the Criminalisation of Clients



*From the end of 2010 to the end of 2020.

WE ARE RAISING THE VOICE OF SEX WORKERS

"There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard."

Arundhati Roy

Bringing together 100 organisations in 30 countries, we represent more than 50,000 unique voices. It is our job to make sure that they come together, cut through the political noise and make history – setting a new path that sees sex workers free to live their lives without the threat of criminalisation, discrimination, violence and coercion. To do this, we are:

- **Building a common language:** To present a united front, ESWA worked with its member groups to develop a series of papers exploring intersectional issues (health, labour, women's, migrant and LGBTI rights) and build a common understanding and language to address them.
- **Evidencing the need:** Sex workers have been fighting to defend their rights for generations. To continue this work, we must research, collate and build the evidence we need to highlight the hypocrisy of laws that claim to protect, but in reality work against us.
- **Advocating and campaigning:** We don't speak for sex workers, we are sex workers. ESWA is a microphone, a way to unite and raise the voice of our community so that organisations, governments and institutions have no choice but to listen.

Feminists for Sex Workers

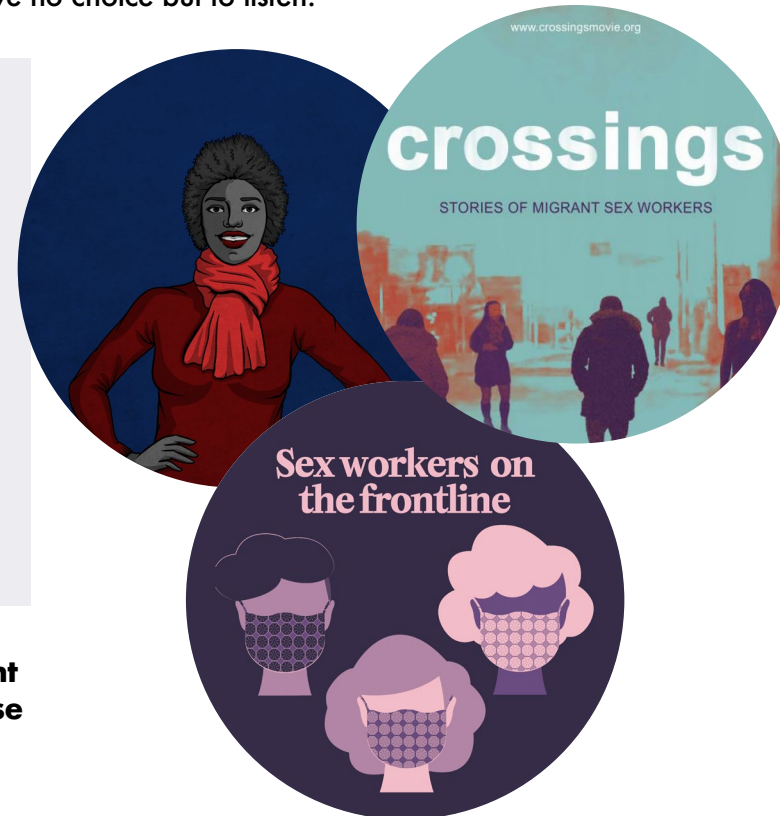
Inspired by International Women's Day, the [Feminists for Sex Workers](#) campaign is designed to make the support of women's rights, feminist organisations, individuals, groups and collectives more visible. Our manifesto has been translated into 14 different languages and is endorsed by 174 organisations in Europe. By aligning our work with the broader feminist movement, we can mobilise allies to jointly fight against negative trends affecting women, LGBT people, migrants and sex workers.

"Sex work is our work, our life and our right to choose. And if the laws deprive us of these rights, those laws must change."

Elena, Ukraine

Justice for Dora and Jasmine

In July 2013, the murders of Dora Özer in Turkey and Petite Jasmine in Sweden triggered worldwide demonstrations. As an expression of anger, grief and injustice - not just at the loss of Dora and Jasmine, but at the senseless and systemic violence sex workers face - our '[Global Day of Action](#)' saw sex workers and allies in 36 cities and five continents stand together to fight for their rights.



Undeserving Victims?

Based on the testimonies of 47 migrant sex workers in 10 European countries, '[Undeserving Victims?](#)' is the first report to evidence the violence experienced by sex workers, and the barriers they face when it comes to accessing justice. Confirming what we have long known to be the case, this report shows:

- Almost 50% of migrant sex workers experiencing physical assault.
- 1 in 4 detailing incidents of sexual assault or rape.
- 45% to have experienced psychological violence.
- Just two-thirds of all crimes reported to the police.

[Launched](#) in October 2020, the event featured direct testimonies of migrant sex workers and welcomed representatives from civil society, institutions, and the European Parliament.

The 'Honeyball Campaign'

In 2014, ESWA demanded the total rejection of a report penned by Mary Honeyball, UK MEP, which conflated sex work with slavery and called for the criminalisation of sex worker clients. In just a few weeks, ESWA's open [letter](#) opposing this resolution was endorsed by 560 NGOs and 94 researchers and academics.

Crossings

To mark Zero Discrimination Day, on March 1st 2019 ESWA launched [Crossings: stories of migrant sex workers in Europe](#). This sex-worker produced documentary exposed the effect of discriminatory laws and policies on migrant sex workers in Europe, and the ways that individuals and groups are fighting back. Produced by members in Serbia, Macedonia, France, Spain and Norway, the documentary tells the stories of Sabrina, Aging, Danny, Albina and Rada. Together they share their experiences and challenge the sensationalist portrayal of sex workers as prostituted women and victims of trafficking.

"My fear is that, from the victim, I am becoming an offender."

Sex worker, Austria

IN THE MEDIA

As well as taking the lead on advocacy campaigns and activity, ESWA is always looking for new avenues and opportunities to raise the voices of our community. Over the years, we have featured in a range of publications and websites, including: Amnesty International, the BBC, The Guardian, Open Democracy, Deutsche Welle, the Washington Post, and The World.

On the front line of COVID-19

When COVID-19 hit, millions of sex workers found themselves locked-down, unable to work and cut-off from their communities, health and social services. From financial aid to emergency accommodation and mental healthcare, '[Sex workers on the frontline](#)' is a groundbreaking report documenting the crucial work done by sex worker organisations to protect each other from the fallout of the pandemic.

WE ARE DEMANDING POLICY CHANGE

Changing minds, policies and practices takes time. But it is the only way to make sure that systems and processes work to protect and respect sex worker rights. Raising the voices of sex workers across Europe and Central Asia, this last decade has seen ESWA become an increasingly prominent player in national and international policy-making arenas. To do this, we are:



- **Forming allyships:** Our movement has inspired organisations including Amnesty International, the European Aids Treatment Group (EATG), the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Europe and World, Transgender Europe and the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) to develop and adopt policies and practices that favour the decriminalisation of sex work.
- **Building strategic alliances:** New relationships with Victim Support Europe, the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, Freedom from Exploitation and Nobody Left Outside have created forum for ESWA to raise awareness of our mission, engage on - and advocate for - specific issues affecting our community.
- **Joining international civil society forums:** ESWA is proud to be a member of several platforms, including the EU HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis and TB Civil Society Forum and the EU Victims' Rights Platform. We also hold participatory status with The Council of Europe.
- **Engaging with international policy-makers:** January 2020 saw our Secretariat relocate to Brussels, Belgium. Being in the heart of the EU has enabled us to engage and connect with members of the Parliament and Commission, raise our profile, and play a more active role in policy-level discussions.

Influencing EU policy for gender equality

At the beginning of this year, we welcomed the inclusion of the sex worker community in the [European Parliament's resolution of 21 January 2021 on the EU Strategy for Gender Equality](#). In particular, we applaud the clear recognition by the European Parliament of the impact of COVID-19 and the need to protect the rights of sex workers before and after such crises.

"[The European Parliament] urges the Commission to establish a concrete framework for the rights and protection of sex workers during and after a crisis; further insists on the importance of including measures and strategies that tackle the discrimination faced by sex workers in access to funding, housing, healthcare, education and other services."

European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 on the EU Strategy for Gender Equality

...AND WON'T STOP UNTIL THE RIGHTS OF ALL SEX WORKERS ARE REALISED

As we look forward to the end of 2021, we have already seen a complete organisational re-brand, re-structure and launch of our new strategic plan. Always growing and always learning, the aim of this work is to make our organisation more visible, our message more powerful, and our actions more accountable.

Taking a stronger focus on priority issues of gender, migration and anti-racism, the last nine months have seen us publish two new reports, '[From vulnerability to resilience: sex workers organising an end to exploitation](#)' and '[Sex workers on the frontline of COVID-19](#)' together with an advocacy toolkit on '[Sex work and HIV in Europe](#)'. We have also launched new programmes on Digital Rights, Mental Health and Anti-Racism. Each is an important step forward, and the perfect start to a new decade of action.

With thanks to...



If you would like to support our work or want to find out more about membership opportunities with ESWA please contact us at info@sexworkeurope.org or visit eswalliance.org.

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